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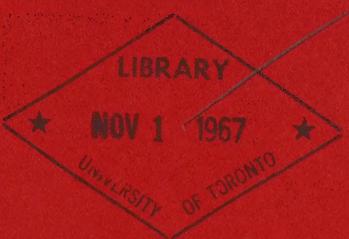
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Automation and the Changing Family

John C. McDonald



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## AUTOMATION AND THE CHANGING FAMILY

John C. McDonald

### I. Introduction

Opinions differ widely about the condition of the contemporary family. From the point of view of material welfare, it can be argued that the members of the majority of families today are better fed, clothed, and sheltered than ever before in human history. And they are more liberally educated, doctored, and entertained than were past generations. Other commentators, however, imply that the modern home is gradually being reduced to a sort of combined motel, restaurant and televiwing salon.

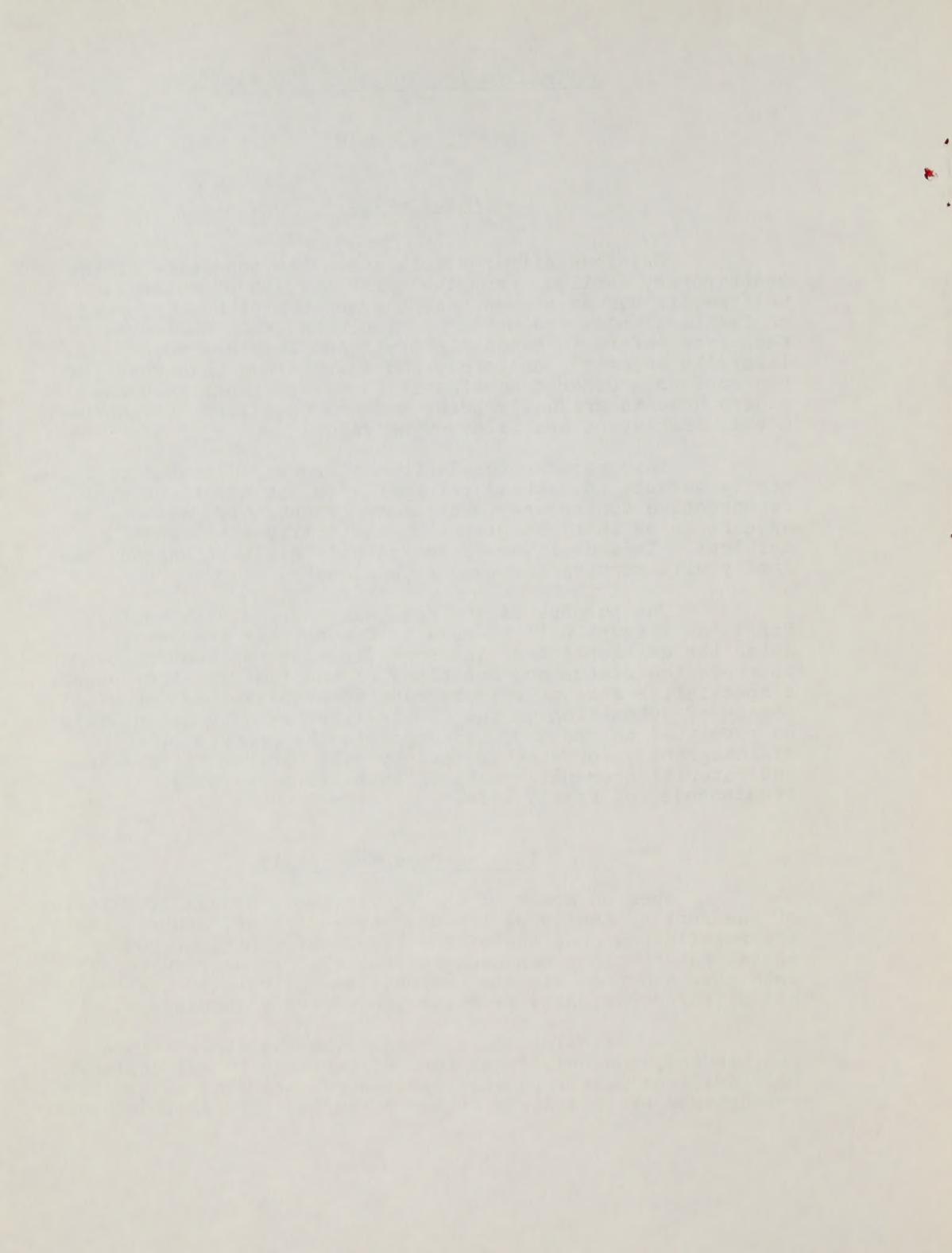
This paper proceeds from a frankly alarmist position, partly because an extreme point of view may sometimes spark constructive controversy, but, more importantly, because it appears to me that the plight of the family has become critical. Indeed, it now seems an open question whether the family will survive the twentieth century.

The purpose of the following analysis is twofold. First, an attempt will be made to demonstrate the way in which the development of industrialization has been allowed to erode the status and functions of the family. And second, a speculative attempt will be made to evaluate the potential impact of automation on the family--whether automation will be permitted to speed up and complete the process of disintegration, or whether society will harness the momentum and material accomplishments of automation to foster a renaissance of family life.

### II. The Changing Family

When we speak of the family, we are usually thinking of the sort of family we are used to--a father, mother, and their children. But one of the important contributions of social anthropology has been to show that in many cultures, both past and present, the composition and role of the family has differed radically from our contemporary stereotype.

For example, while monogamy is the ethical ideal and, indeed, the only legal form of marriage in our society, polygamy, and less frequently polyandry, are alternative forms encountered by students of other cultures. Or, an interesting



variation from the pattern of bringing up children we are used to relates to societies in which a distinction is drawn between the family of procreation and the family of orientation. In such cases the children are often reared in the household of their uncle--their mother's brother.

The almost unlimited variety of family structure and family life may seem bewildering, perhaps even repugnant, to those of us who have been conditioned to regard 'Mum, Dad and the kids' as the only 'natural' pattern. However, such a cross-cultural point of view is important because it reminds us that social institutions such as the family are always undergoing change.

At any point in time, the structure and role of the family are being moulded by the requirements of the natural and social environment and by the prescriptions of society's values and beliefs. Basically the family is simply one of a number of ways of responding socially to human needs such as those for procreation, the sustenance and protection of children, the primary socialization of the young, and the transmission of the culture to succeeding generations. In different cultures, or in the same society at different times, the family may play a greater or smaller part in the institutionalization of these needs and activities.

Second, since all the institutions in a society or culture are interrelated in a complex, interdependent web, a change in one set of relationships is bound to induce changes in other institutions. For example, a change in religion from Mahomedanism to Christianity might be expected to produce a major change in family life since Christianity prescribes the religious virtue of monogamy.

When change takes place in any part of the environment, therefore--when any new force is created, occurs spontaneously, or intrudes from outside--a chain reaction of social change is set in motion. The various interrelated social institutions undergo a process of mutual adaptation in an attempt to establish a new balance--a new state of social equilibrium. This process of institutional accommodation is probably never perfectly attained before some new change occurs which requires further institutional modification. Indeed, some societies have proved unable to surmount the challenge posed by too rapid or too frequent changes.

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The reason why we sometimes fail to appreciate the dynamic nature of institutional change is that it has usually taken place so slowly. In pre-industrial society the pace of change was so gradual that it would have required a perspective of many generations to mark and map its course.

The development of the modern family, however, can be traced relatively easily because of dramatic changes that transformed the traditional family of our grandparents and great-grandparents have taken place in the relatively short span of approximately a hundred years. Nor is the tempo of change slowing down. Indeed, for the foreseeable future, with the advent of automation, the contemporary family will probably have to cope with an accelerating rate of technological and social change.

Summarizing. The two main points we might bear in mind thus far are first, that the family is continuously changing and second, that changes in the family both affect and are affected by changes taking place in other social and economic institutions.

### III. The Traditional Family

As a backdrop to a subsequent discussion of the contemporary family, it will be useful to begin with a brief sketch of the traditional family of the mid-nineteenth century. At the outset, care should be taken to avoid the temptation to idealize the traditional family. All too aware of the disadvantages, weaknesses, and problems associated with the modern family, there is a tendency for us to see only the strength inherent in the three-generation family without taking its offsetting drawbacks into account.

For example, family life a hundred years ago, before the advent of farm machinery and modern household conveniences, demanded hard and unremitting physical toil from its members. And prior to the development of modern transportation and communications, the outlook of the family must necessarily have been somewhat parochial, demanding a degree of behavioural conformity that imposed heavy penalties on deviant and particularly talented individuals. Paternal authoritarianism, conflict with inlaws living in the same home, and the patronization of unmarried relatives attached to the household



are but a few of the latent sources of friction inherent in the traditional family.

Even if such disadvantages seemed to us to be a reasonable price to pay for deeper emotional roots, however, there would be little practical point in a nostalgic and romantic advocacy of a return to the simplicity and richness of family life before the advent of the machine. Whatever one's point of view may be concerning the extent to which industrialization may or may not have been harnessed to create a satisfactory human environment, the possibilities for future social progress clearly do not lie in the direction of a rejection of science and technology. The clock simply could not be turned back on industrialization and urbanization to re-create a pastoral, autarchic pattern of family life without creating widespread chaos.

Bearing this caveat in mind, it may be instructive to explore the stucture and functions of the traditional family, assess the extent to which the family articulated satisfactorily with other social institutions, and evaluate its success in meeting the practical and psychological requirements of its various members.

A century ago the typical family was a large rural family whose members shared in a round of agricultural and household tasks that resulted in a highly self-sufficient economic entity. The family tended to be large, not just because numerous children were an economic asset on the farm, but also because the family normally embraced three generations. And, in addition to the grandparents, the family often included unmarried aunts or uncles.

While it is true that town and even city life was well developed by the time of Confederation, the family living on the farm, both in terms of number and way of life, was archtypical. That is to say, the stucture and ethos of the town family a hundred years ago bore a much closer resemblance to its rural counterpart than to the modern urban or suburban family.



As well as being large and embracing three generations, the traditional family was part of an extended family or kinship system that included the families of brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles and cousins--usually living on farms within a half day's buggy ride of one another. Indeed, the local community might typically be comprised of several of these extended kinship systems, most of whose members would be connected with one another through ties of either blood or marriage.

The main source of the traditional family's strength and cohesion probably sprang from the functional interdependence of the roles of its members in the family's economic activity. The primary economic activity was, of course, agriculture--the growing of crops and husbanding of livestock. In those days acreages were smaller and farming activity more diversified. The prototype was a 100-acre mixed farm designed to attain a high degree of economic self-sufficiency.

In a labour intensive co-operative enterprise of this sort, the effort and contribution of each member of the family, from children to grandparents, were clearly defined and clearly needed. And through his contribution, each could earn recognition and status as a valued member of the family circle.

Nor was the economic role the only functional role fulfilled by the family. In an age that preceded the motorcar and mass media, the family was also thrown back on its own social, cultural, and recreational resources. In these activities, as well as in the economic sphere, the large size of the family was a distinct advantage.

The social life of the traditional family differed from that of the modern family in that it was largely a 'homemade' product dependent on the active participation and contribution of its members--most such activities transcending differences in age and sex. All members, it might be said, performed as both cast and audience in the family play.

An important part of the social life of the traditional family, however, took place in the wider context of the extended family and local community. A barn-raising may be seen as a particularly apt example as it illustrates two important themes in traditional family life. First,



it illustrates the way in which both work and recreation were often combined in a single activity, in contrast to the sharply drawn dichotomy between work and leisure in contemporary society.

At a barn-raising heavy work was transformed into a type of play by dividing up the task and choosing teams to compete against one another. This work-play activity would be succeeded by a banquet supper spread out on long trestle tables on the lawn and, in the evening by square dancing on the pine planks of the new barn floor.

The second point illustrated by the barn-raising is the high degree of mutual help that characterized the extended family group, compared with the modern family's tendency to withdraw from active community involvement. It might be argued that this ethos of co-operation was nothing more than a necessity for survival in the pioneer community. However that may be, such solidary activity provided both families and their members with clear and meaningful ways of relating to the wider community.

This glimpse of the traditional family would not be complete without reference to the central importance of its spiritual role. Though it may be difficult for our busy, secular generation to grasp, family worship was the essential core of traditional family life. The worship of God constituted the purpose to which the family was dedicated and provided the inner focus around which the life of the family revolved. It was not only that reading from the Scriptures and family prayer were important daily rather than Sunday-only rituals. Religion provided the very warp on which was woven the family's whole pattern of activity, both at work and at play.

Summing up. The functional interdependence of its members in providing economic, spiritual, social, and recreational sustenance gave the traditional family a clear sense of direction and purpose. The size of the traditional family and its constituent status in a wider kinship system imparted stability and security and provided strong links with the wider community. And finally, the wholistic and life-long nature of the human relationships involved in the three-generation family bestowed deep and abiding emotional rewards of its members.



#### IV. The Impact of Industrialization

The main force that transformed the traditional family into the contemporary conjugal or nuclear family was the rapid industrialization that took place in Europe and North America during the nineteenth century. In the less industrialized parts of the world--Africa, South-east Asia, and Latin America--the extended family pattern continues largely unchanged.

When we speak of industrialization in this context, the thought is not to limit the concept simply to mechanization but to suggest a congeries of interrelated phenomena, including factory production, urbanization, modern transportation (particularly the automobile), mass media communications, etcetera. In short, the term is intended to imply the whole modern, large-scale, complex interdependent system of producing and exchanging goods and services.

The specific characteristics of the new economic system that combined to transform the structure and role of the family were the removal of work from rural homes to urban factories and offices, the division of labour and the occupational specialization required by mass production, and the extension of the pecuniary wage to become the common method of payment for work and for distributing purchasing power. A brief way of summing up these effects would be to adopt the technical term used by economists and say that it was the labour mobility requirements of the industrial economy that induced the obsolescence of the traditional family.

At the beginning of the industrial revolution an attempt was made to carry the traditional family pattern of production over into the textile mills and coal mines. Whole families were employed, including small children, adolescents and mothers. Part of the appeal of this hiring policy from the employer's point of view was that individual wages could be lowered to the point where the family's combined earnings were just sufficient to ensure minimum subsistence.

However, even at this early stage, the pattern of members of a family working together as an integral production unit had been disrupted because of the scale of the enterprise and rationalization of work assignments. In a large mill or



mine the children might not even see either parent between dawn and dusk whistles, and it would be only by accident that a parent would supervise his own child's apprenticeship.

Gradually, the twin forces of humanitarianism and enhanced literacy requirements of industry modified the composition of the labour force. The adult male emerged as the 'breadwinner' for the family, while the wife and mother's role was more and more restricted to homemaking and child-rearing.

In short, the economic role of the family which traditionally had been one of both production and consumption was progressively limited to consumption. As a consumption-oriented institution dependent on the income of a single wage-earner, the needs, and eventually the size and structure, of the family were gradually transformed. Once the focus of production had been removed from the family, numerous children were seen as an economic liability rather than as an economic asset. In similar fashion the urban household had no functional economic roles for grandparents or unattached relatives to perform. Hence they came to be regarded as simply 'more mouths to feed'.

This is not to suggest that other factors such as rising educational aspirations, the dissemination of birth control information, etcetera, did not play an important part in the evolution of the nuclear family. The thesis being advanced does claim, however, that idea that 'the family that travels lightest, travels farthest' was primarily inspired by the mobility requirements of the new system of economic production. Experience was quick to demonstrate that in the new environment the smallest family units enjoyed the highest material standard of living and that large families encumbered by extended kinship obligations never moved far from the threshold of poverty.

Briefly then, both the truncated two-generation structure and the reduction in family size that resulted from fewer offspring may be regarded as direct institutional responses to the forces of mechanization and industrialization.



In a rather similar way the demands of the industrial system also sowed the seeds for the gradual dissolution of the extended family or kinship system. For in addition to taking the father out of the home to perform a specialized occupational task in a factory or office, the regional and urban concentration of industry required a high degree of geographical mobility on the part of the labour force.

The strength of the traditional kinship group had lain in the spatial proximity and continual contact of its constituent families. Under the new dispensation, in order to pursue occupational specialties, seek promotion, or even obtain employment, sons often located in cities hundreds of miles away from their parents' home. As a result, filial ties and kinship obligations became more and more tenuous, dependent on formalized, intermittent contact through correspondence and the long-distance telephone. Face-to-face interaction became progressively limited to vacation periods and ceremonial occasions.

While the change in the structure and size of the family resulted from its obsolescence as a unit of economic production, changes in the functions of the family were not limited to the economic role. Streamlined and mobile, the nuclear family lacked the resources to discharge the spiritual, educational, social and recreational functions which had formed integral dimensions of the traditional family's role.

In keeping with the rationalization taking place in the economic sphere, such non-economic activities tended to be split off from the family and developed as separate specialized institutions staffed by qualified experts. Schools, clubs, mass media entertainment, and family welfare agencies grew up to take over a wide range of the traditional family's functions.

It is not the intention of this paper to argue that such services and activities are performed less adequately by professional personnel. The intention is rather to point out that these specialized institutions are largely geared to the requirements of individuals in various age-sex or interest groups, and have hence tended to be centrifugal to the family as an institution.



To sum up briefly. The impact of industrialization on the family has been to adapt its structure and role to the mobility requirements of the factory system. In order to achieve this, the family has been stripped of its traditional functions but new and important roles for the family to play have not been substituted. As a result, the contemporary family floats in a sort of functional limbo. It no longer provides either the institutional context for the main activities of its members nor constitutes the primary vehicle through which they relate themselves to society.

#### V. The Contemporary Family

The argument to be advanced in this section is that the modifications that have taken place in the pattern of family life to meet the demands of an industrial economy have been automatically allowed to take place at the expense of the integrity of the family. There has been little debate about the social priorities involved nor any attempt to plan alternative forms of institutional accommodation that might have strengthened the family and turned urban, industrial society to more significant human account.

As a result, the contemporary family stands stripped and vulnerable before the pressures of the mass society, still capable of functioning on a day-to-day basis, but without the practical and emotional depth of resources necessary to survive and surmount life's inevitable challenges and adversities. The serious illness of a parent, loss of employment, a burden of debt, indeed any such exigency, may stretch and snap the fragile bonds of the nuclear family. And since the family lacks the necessary institutional supports and built-in safety valves, the repair of a marital rupture may often be beyond the professional competence of the psychiatrist or social welfare agency.

Society is, of course, concerned--even appalled--by the multiple problems of modern family life--marital discord, divorce and broken homes; conflict between parents and adolescent offspring, juvenile delinquency and crime; the isolation and loneliness of older people in our culture; alcoholism, stress diseases, and the ubiquity of mental ill health. We ask ourselves what can be going wrong, and hurry to establish new agencies to undertake research and programs to counteract each of these problems as though they were discrete phenomena.



Quite clearly one of the important things that is going wrong--and in a clearly predictable way--is that the reserves of the nuclear family's emotional bank have been overdrawn. Some experts on the family argue that this is not so. They point out that the modern family, relieved of traditional functions that are now extraneous, is free to devote its full attention to its primary purpose--that of fostering love and affection among its members. They point with pride to the motto of 'togetherness' that has been recently and hopefully coined for the family.

But the terminology itself gives the game away as it exposes the structural and functional nature of the problem --a problem that slogans and incantations will do little to dispel. The idea of 'togetherness' would simply not have been understood in the traditional family. How would one expect a family to function on any other basis than by the continual mutual co-operation and interaction of its members?

The basic fallacy in the argument of those who idealize the nature of relationships in the contemporary family lies in a failure to appreciate the fact that love and affection can be neither created nor cultivated in a vacuum. Both human affection and respect are derived sentiments that grow from shared values and experiences, mutual sacrifices and obligations, and, above all, continual functional interdependence and support.

If it is true that 'to know a person is to love him', then the essential point in this analysis of the modern family is that its members do not really know one another--indeed, cannot do so because of the segmental and intermittent nature of their relationships. Let me illustrate some of the major tensions in the contemporary family from the point of view of its several members. My purpose will be to demonstrate that these problems are not individual and accidental but result directly from structural weaknesses, disarticulations, and dysfunctions in the modern family as an institution.

The intolerable strain between a husband and wife that may eventually lead to a separation or divorce normally does not have its genesis in any lack of mutual affection, sexual infidelity or incompatibility. On the contrary, the root of the problem probably lies in an emotional over-investment in a single other person--the spouse. No one is psychologically capable of bearing such a total and intense emotional responsibility over a prolonged period.



To understand why such total emotional dependency is apt to take place in the modern marriage, consider the situation of the adult married male in our society. It is virtually impossible for him to contract a deep emotional relationship with an adult female other than his wife without earning the reputation of philanderer or 'wolf'. Even worse, in a society haunted by a deep-seated fear of homosexuality, it is dangerous for him to invest in a spontaneous affectional commitment to another adult male. Inevitably, therefore, the wife is constrained to accept almost complete responsibility for her husband's sense of identity and psychic health. The relationship is largely reciprocal. In an all but a completely literal sense each constitutes the other's only true friend. This situation provides a direct contrast to the traditional family milieu in which such emotional investments were more widely diffused among parents and kin.

Although probably fewer modern marriages founder on sexual ignorance and incompatibility than was the case in the heyday of Victorian morality, tension both inside and outside the family undoubtedly has a deleterious effect on this basic and important dimension of the marital relationship. To be brief, I would simply argue that a sedentary, indoors, harried and materialistically oriented people have neither the vitality, time, sense of humour, nor imagination prerequisite to fundamentally satisfying sexual relationships. An instructive--though rather extreme case--in this regard is that of James Bond, the popular fictional folk hero and virility image, who often appears to require the titillation of a couple of cold-blooded killings before he is up to the challenge of physical intimacy.

A rather more important sort of marital tension in the nuclear family springs from a lack of understanding and sympathy for each other's roles. Unfamiliar with the inexorable grind of the factory or the tension of the office, the wife is apt to idealize her husband's day as a series of extended coffee breaks filled with stimulating discussions about politics, automobiles, or hockey heroes. Equally, the husband, emancipated from the daily demands and conversational limitations inherent in dealing with young children, visualizes his wife's day as a morning of perfunctory button-pushing, succeeded by a long gin and tonic, stretched out on the living-room sofa watching the afternoon movie on television.



As a result of this daily spatial separation and understandable lack of empathy, it is not surprising that evenings and weekends spent in one another's company may not be entirely free from symptoms of friction. It is simply that the needs of the two partners are conflicting. The husband, psychologically fatigued by monotonous work or manipulative interpersonal interaction, seeks recreation in the home through quiet withdrawal. The wife's perennial gambit to initiate conversation: 'What **happened** at work today?' is really an appeal to the husband as her eyes and ears to the exciting outside world for some relief from the ennui of her daily domestic confinement.

It seems to me that it is becoming an increasingly accurate caricature of the inadequacy of our social environment to observe the tension-ridden husband at the close of the working day intent on attaining his home as a haven of privacy and relaxation. The following morning, thankful for relief from the cumulative tensions within the family, finds him 'beelining' back to work to fade with relief into the comparative impersonality of factory or office.

Nor do the problems of the contemporary family disappear when the children have grown up and set out to establish conjugal units of their own. The plight of the middle-aged matron in our society is particularly poignant. However hectic the period of childbearing and child-rearing, a young mother is all too aware of the fact that she is needed. But at the very time when the children are leaving home and she requires her husband's company most, he is likely to be reaching a point where the demands of a successful career induce him to spend less and less time in the home or he may have achieved a position of seniority at the factory that entitles him to frequent opportunities for lucrative overtime.

Faced with the prospect of an empty house, the wife has only a limited number of courses to follow. If her husband is both well off and generous, she may elect to become a full-time consumer--a glamour girl, with weekly visits to hairdresser and beautician, endless shopping to accumulate a wardrobe of beautiful and expensive clothes, and biennial redecorating and refurbishing of the house as an appropriate backdrop to glamour. An alternative role is that of good companion--slippers at the door to greet the tired spouse, his favourite casserole in the warming-oven, amenable to his every mood, whether it requires an evening of patient listening to soothe or a neighbourhood movie to cheer.



With the obvious lack of personal fulfillment and social satisfaction offered by such home-centred roles, it is not too difficult to appreciate the sort of motivation that has been attracting large numbers of married women into the labour force, particularly since the 1940's. Also, given the extent to which voluntary traditional activities have been professionalized and the extent to which pecuniary and material values are stressed in contemporary society, it is not surprising that work for pay tends to be preferred over other sorts of community activity, even for many women for whom economic need may not be a compelling consideration.

The failure of the modern family is particularly sad in relation to the grandparents. I suspect that the serenity on the faces of the handsome grey-haired couple often pictured in insurance advertisements may be somewhat illusory. The point is that enjoying 'the golden years' of retirement in a Florida trailer colony cannot be a satisfactory substitute for the status and useful functions that human beings of all ages require.

In traditional society status and functions for older people were provided through the family. As the physical strength and vitality of the older generation began to fail, lighter chores such as sewing, knitting and the cultivation of the kitchen garden still needed doing. More important, the wisdom of the grandmother concerning housekeeping and child-rearing was called upon and acknowledged as was the accumulated experience of the grandfather in relation to the care of the livestock and the planting and reaping of the crops. Rewarding, too, in the traditional family was the rather special bond between the very old and the very young, since both enjoyed a little more leisure than the other members of the busy household.

So much for some of the problems encountered by adults as they attempt to cope with the practical and psychological shortcomings of the contemporary family. Many of the difficulties of children and adolescents in relation to the modern family are simply the predictable reciprocals of their parents' problems and result from the same sorts of structural and institutional deficiencies.



With the popularization of Freudian psychology throughout the mass society, there are probably remarkably few young parents who are unaware of the importance of the formative years from one to six in conditioning the child's personality. It is likely reasonably accurate to hypothesize that severe deprivation of affection in early childhood may tend to produce anti-social behaviour--even criminality--in later life, just as over-protection may result in anxiety and withdrawal. The achievement of just the right balance of love and discipline is an exacting challenge for the modern young mother on whom the onus of child-rearing falls.

With the tension occasioned by her child's toilet training extending a few weeks longer than that of her neighbour's child, the young matron must often long for the sure, if sometimes misplaced, advice always forthcoming from the old-fashioned grandmother. Indeed, were it not for the common sense and humanity of Dr. Benjamin Spock and his ubiquitous paperback book on Child Care, the psychological carnage among both young mothers and their infants in the nuclear family might be even greater.

A long list could be drawn up of practical and emotional difficulties encountered by contemporary youngsters: their artificial insulation from such natural phenomena as birth, aging, and death; the way in which they are protected from experiencing the inevitability of failure; the unrealistic expectations created by constant exposure to the mythology of romantic love; the self-manipulation involved in the development of the 'other-directed' and 'success-oriented' personality; and the confusion bred by the sharp dichotomy between the ideal precept of the golden rule and the secular reality of the rule of gold.

But the most important single handicap for the child growing up in the modern family is probably the absence of useful chores to perform. Filling the water bucket, bringing in an armload of firewood, gathering the eggs, and the need for 101 tasks for supple fingers and strong young backs have been efficiently eliminated in the design of the suburban split level or ranch style bungalow. The result is that the modern urban youngster tends to be regarded by his parents--and more important, sees himself--as a free-loading passenger on the nuclear family excursion.



As the youngster has little opportunity or motivation to earn a recognized and respected status within the family through a functional contribution to its welfare, discipline is apt to be erratic, with parents vacillating between resentment and criticism on the one hand and a veritable showering of praise and gifts on the other hand. Above all, modern parents, consciously or unconsciously, are prone to demand from their children constant manifestations of love and affection as compensation for unremitting and unreciprocated parental sacrifice. It is needless to add that such expectations are neither realistic nor realized.

A common manifestation of this theme of parent-child relationships in the conjugal family is for the parent to view the child, not as a discrete individual with a unique combination of needs and talents, but as a projection of the parent's own ego. The temptation must be strong in such cases to manipulate the younger and more malleable personality toward success in achieving particular goals that may have thwarted the older person. One can only guess how many mediocre medical practitioners, dissatisfied lawyers and frustrated pianists this syndrome may have produced.

The most glaring weakness of the contemporary family, it seems to me, is the way it fails to provide adequate direction and support for its teenage members during that difficult transitional period of adolescence between childhood and full adult status. Since both J.D. Salinger in his perceptive novel 'Catcher in the Rye' and the New York sociologist, Paul Goodman, in his essay 'Growing Up Absurd', have delineated many of these relationships with care and sympathy, my comments will be brief and restricted to two important problems.

The first problem is that of occupational choice and vocational training for the young person. Perhaps the nub of the difficulty can be illustrated by imagining the visit of a stranger to both a traditional and a contemporary family. A hundred years ago, the stranger inquiring for the farmer's whereabouts, would be informed that father was seeding oats in the back thirty-acre field but would be in for lunch in half an hour if the visitor would care to wait. Today the youngster could only tell the stranger that Dad was away at work--at the factory or at the office, having but the dimmest notion of the operations taking place there and the vaguest apprehension of his father's particular job.



The point is that the youngster in the traditional family had before him continuously a model of the adult male role. As a child, through emulation in play and, as an adolescent, through an extended apprenticeship supervised by his father, the young person naturally and gradually assumed the full vocational mantle of adult status.

By contrast, the occupational identity and destiny of the modern teenager lies almost completely outside the province of the family's competence and control. The youth of today are on their own to an unprecedented degree in making the abrupt, and often traumatic, transition from childhood and education to employment and adult responsibility. About all that conscientious parents can do--unqualified to counsel and direct young people through the bewildering maze of contemporary occupational specialization--is to encourage their offspring to stay on at school and obtain as much education as they can absorb or the parents afford.

The second broad problem area in the modern family that may result in friction between parents and adolescents concerns dating. In many traditional societies courtship and marriage occurs with the advent of biological maturity. In contemporary, industrial society marriage is typically postponed until sufficient income is assured to warrant the establishment of a separate and independent household. As a result of this protracted lag between biological and economic maturity, a host of emotional problems are introduced which frustrate youth and haunt their parents.

From the parents' point of view, the dilemma of the mother of a teenage daughter has both its humour and its pathos. Sitting up watching the clock and waiting for her daughter's safe return from a date, the modern mother must spend many hours hoping that her offspring is not so physically attractive as to entice her escort to break the unwritten limits of the dating code, and the balance of the time reassuring herself that the child is sufficiently attractive to avoid the fate of the wallflower with its foreshadowing of spinsterhood. From the point of view of the young people themselves, the appeal of contracting 'steady' relationships--the bane of the parents of secondary school youth--must be very strong in terms of providing emotional security in a mobile and rapidly changing society.



I cannot help but be intrigued to ponder the significance of the widespread appeal of Elvis Presley and The Beatles in relation to this youth culture. It seems unlikely that the near hysterical reaction of teenage audiences can be explained completely in terms of musical appreciation. The reason, I think, why adults tend to react unfavourably is because they intuitively realize that the confusion of values and the atrophying of the family and community in the mass society is producing a generation of emotionally deprived young people. Do the Beatles perhaps provide a catharsis through which young people can for a moment break through the impersonality and constraints of modern society to communicate with one another, even though strangers, at a frankly uninhibited emotional level--yet avoid contracting deep obligations or lasting commitments?

To sum up briefly. I have argued and attempted to illustrate that the interests and activities of its members in urban industrial society tend to diverge from rather than converge in the nuclear family. As a consequence of the segmental and frequently conflicting nature of the relationships of its constituents, the contemporary family, as an important institution in modern mass society, is rapidly becoming obsolescent and vestigial. Were it not for the imminent advent of new concepts and forces whose momentum may possibly be harnessed to support and revitalize family and community life, a student of social change would have no alternative but to anticipate the early demise of the family in favour of a more completely atomized form of human organization.

#### VI. Automation and the Changing Family

It would certainly be misleading to imply that either the speed or pervasiveness of automation can be forecast with any degree of clarity or precision. And the possibility of predicting the exact nature and extent of automation's impact on a particular social institution such as the family is quite out of the question. There are, however, a number of broad implications automation may hold in store for the future of the family that invite interesting--perhaps even profitable--speculation and discussion.



One eminent North American sociologist has suggested that automation will simply complete the revolution in family life set in-train by mechanization. Just as education and the occupational preparation of youth have been seconded to the state and to employers, so now will the responsibility for the care of infants and the upbringing of young children be assumed by professionally staffed institutions. According to this thesis, a combination of high-rise urban apartment buildings for adults and rural residential communities for children will gradually replace suburbia's uneasy attempt to straddle the conflict between the welfare of the family and the demands of the world of work.

Although the social efficiency suggested by such a preview of our automated future strikes me with a rather Orwellian chill, I would hasten to agree that more genuine human warmth might well be kindled between parents and children around a cottage camp fire than may flicker through the dampening effects of year-round bickering and recrimination. The point is that even relatively short periods of time such as summer vacations when parents have time free to share wholeheartedly in the interest and activities of their offspring may be preferable to the distracted half-attention accorded the majority of children in the hurried and anxious atmosphere of the modern home. The success of the collective child-rearing arrangements in the Israeli kibbutzim, for example, suggest quite clearly that the qualities of spontaneity and genuine pleasure in one another's company are the vital dimensions of parent-child relationships.

The weakness of such a prognosis concerning the future of the family is that it appears to be based upon out experience within industrial society to date, logically extended to suit the requirements of a phase of advanced mechanization. In assuming a continuation and intensification of the characteristics of a work-oriented society, it seems to betray a fundamental misconception about the nature and significance of automation. Both philosophically and technically, automation presages a reversal of fragmentation and specialization and heralds the advent of a new era of integration. It remains to be seen, of course, how quickly and successfully a complementary human garment may be fashioned so that the outworn social and psychological trapping of an age of mechanization may be discarded.



Viewed from a perspective in which the highly rationalized and mobile sort of labour force required by mechanization may be becoming progressively obsolescent, the form and pattern of social institutions most congenial to an age of advanced mechanization may also fairly be regarded as transitional. Since automation, at least in theory, holds out the ultimate possibility of providing for society's material wants with a minimum of human labour, it may be somewhat premature to predict or advocate the early demise of the family on the grounds that it constitutes a serious labour market 'imperfection'.

Indeed, unless Parkinson's Law is invoked as a conscious instrument of policy to expand the already sizable superstructure of useless make-work in order to simulate full employment (as society may be tempted to do if it funks the challenge of inventing alternative mechanisms to effect an equitable distribution of goods and services), allowing the strident claims of mechanization to administer the family's coup de grace may turn out to have been unwise as well as unnecessary. In fact, is a society in which the exigencies of production may be progressively overshadowed by problems of distribution and consumption, permitting the family to be torpedoed at this stage might prove to have been tragically myopic even on narrow economic grounds. That is to say, although telling arguments can be put forward to demonstrate that, by continuing on into the factory era, the family has become a costly and anachronistic impediment to the achievement of full productive efficiency, there appears to be a rather wide measure of consensus among both economists and advertisers that the family constitutes an almost ideal consumption unit.

Though it is impossible to predict the sort of positive institutional responses society will make to automation, what does seem reasonably clear is that a diminishing preoccupation with work is likely to create a social void which will demand sweeping institutional rearrangements. In this process of reshaping social relationships and priorities, it may well turn out that automation, consumption and leisure will combine to provide an environment more conducive to a flourishing of family life than have mechanization, factory production, and the supremacy of the job.



Were the dictates of advanced mechanization allowed to destroy the family at this stage, it is quite conceivable that succeeding generations would simply have to begin the arduous task of rebuilding such an institution from scratch. The reasoned basis for this suggestion is that some sort of meaningful primary social context will certainly be required if the material accomplishments and leisure provided by automation are to be successfully channelled toward the enhancement of human development and satisfaction. If this proposition is accepted, then it follows that the course of wisdom during the difficult transitional decades that lie ahead will be to progressively shift out emphasis from the receding problems of economic production to stepping up the tempo of social investment required to shore up the depleted resources of the modern family.

Neither the space nor the competence to draw up a comprehensive catalogue of needed policies and programs fall to my lot. Even an hour's serious reflection, however, suggests the beginning of a long list which would include: slum clearance, urban renewal, and the provision of adequate and attractive accommodation for families at rates they can afford to pay; generous family income maintenance as a right of citizenship rather than a humiliating dole; promotion of physical and mental health of families as organic social entities to replace the patching up of the pathology of discrete individuals; ending the physical and psychological segregation of older people and encouraging a reforging of their family and community ties; expansion of family welfare services (including day nurseries, visiting homemaker and nursing services, marital and family counselling) and provision for the adequate financing of such expanded services through taxation; and a fundamental re-thinking and reorganization of those community institutions and activities that are concerned with the spiritual, educational, and cultural dimensions of family life. Nothing less than such a courageous commitment, broad-gauged policy, and integrated program will suffice to sustain the integrity of the family through the transitional decades of rapid and accelerating change that lie ahead. If such a program is not mounted now and pushed forward with determination and vigour, the question of how the family might have fared in an era of automation is likely to remain an academic one.



In pondering the family's long-range future and discussing the ways in which automation may affect its prospects, there appears to be ample scope for both cynicism and hope. Just as the contemporary family has been moulded and conditioned by the pressures of work in an age of mechanization, so eventually will the dispensation and utilization of leisure shape the family of the future. In industrial society to date leisure has tended to be defined as an antidote to the nasty but necessary business of earning a living. More and more in the mass society leisure seems to be viewed as a sort of consumer good to be indulged privately and passively.

Just as the long-run logic of mechanization might have been to reduce the individual to a production robot, so the ultimate effect of automation may be to convert him into a perfect robot of consumption. The material abundance and abundant leisure promised by automation are not of themselves blessings. Indeed, in default of an adequate structure of values and social institutions, automation may merely usher in a new era of barbarism. In such a brave new world of consumption and leisure, one's days might be devoted to a conscientious round of the supermarkets and shopping plazas and one's evenings spent passively sponging up commercial television's coy advertisements and indifferent programming.

Such a human nightmare is the demagogue's fond dream--the very stuff from which monolithic totalitarianism can be fashioned. Bought off with tinsel and toys and weaned from all conflicting loyalties, the citizen is finally brought into direct confrontation in order that he may immolate himself before the majesty of the state. In this particular social recipe it is no oversight that institutional ingredients such as family, community, church, and voluntary association have been omitted. Professor David Reisman's 'Lonely Crowd' may be only a step away from an alienated mass society. The callous, or even thoughtless, exploitation of automated technology could constitute that step!

What should be quickly added, however, is that accompanying automation will come countervailing influences and opportunities for strengthening the family. The most direct contribution promised by automation is an end to material scarcity and human want. The dramatic increase in the flow of goods and services made possible by automatic technology, accompanied by equally imaginative monetary and



distributive innovations, could finally write paid to the appalling account that poverty has been allowed to run up in the affluent society. Anyone familiar with the multiple and interconnected problems of the poor family will readily concede that the basic blow required to break this vicious circle is the provision of a regular and adequate income.

Less obvious perhaps, but not less important, for the future of the family is the impact material abundance may have on middle-class family values and priorities. It is only in a situation of real or contrived material scarcity that invidious comparisons of wealth can be taken seriously as a basis for social status. Many fathers embroiled in the rat race or mothers preoccupied 'keeping up with the Joneses' aver that it is only 'for the sake of the family' or 'to give the children a good start in life'. In future, parents somewhat less obsessed by the problem of providing the material wherewithal may be freer to explore what family life is really about.

The substantial increase in leisure time proffered by automation constitutes another important set of opportunities for family renewal. In the first place, it will be possible to reintroduce the husband and father back into the home as a member in good standing. The transformation of the husband from his present status as a sort of privileged weekend guest to the more natural role of a father with a full share in homemaking and child-rearing may go a long way toward reducing marital tension and conflict between parents and children. A reciprocal advantage would be the release of the young mother from her total domestic commitment, allowing her to participate in and contribute to the activities of the wider community. Simply by providing time for the members of the family to get to know one another again and share in one another's interests and activities, automation may encourage renewed family solidarity.

Further, just as time saved from work for pay outside the home could be used to foster a reunion of the family on a day-to-day basis, so automation, along with concomitant development in transportation and communications, could reduce the geographic mobility required of the modern family to meet the shifting demands for an industrial labour force. Quite literally, I believe that it will be possible in the not far distant future for a family to take up permanent residence in a community of their choice--say in Prince Edward County--and commute with equal ease, as service



to society or intellectual and cultural interests may dictate, to Toronto, Ottawa, or Montreal.

Contrasted with the emotional upheavals and deprivations suffered by William Whyte's prototype organization man as he pursues his promotion from city to city, such deep community roots and life-long human relationships are not without appeal, especially when participation in the significant civilized opportunities of metropolitan life need not be sacrificed. As a result of such a decline in the mobility demands made on the family, it would not be altogether surprising to witness a refLOURISHING of kinship relationships, perhaps even the provision of chairs by the family hearth for the grandparents.

Whatever opportunities and pitfalls automation may hold in store, the position of the family in future society will depend on whether there are useful and important functions for it to perform. Is there a viable function for the family in the future comparable to the constellation of functions--particularly the co-operative economic activity--that gave the family its cohesion and unquestioned status in traditional society? Unfortunately the answer to this question lies hidden in a maze of technical and social probabilities, shrouded in misty patterns of emerging institutional and human relationships, and veiled from us in nascent values and sentiments, yet only dimly and intuitively perceived. But discuss the functional future of the family we must--if only in the most general and tentative terms--for a social institution without functional justification is bound to atrophy and ultimately disappear.

Although a good argument can be made that society's preoccupation in the future will simply shift from production to the joys of consumption, it seems to me that in a society of plenty, where the limits to the quantity and variety of consumer goods are set by automated plant and natural resources rather than by human labour, the goal of material affluence must eventually pall. Having finally achieved material security, we will, I believe, turn to a pursuit of those challenges and opportunities for new experience and human growth that represent the other side of our nature. In this process the outworn dichotomy between work and leisure will gradually give place to a new concept of integrated activity dedicated to the full development of the spiritual, intellectual, aesthetic, and cultural facets of the human personality.



To sum up briefly. Although it may be as much a tenet of belief as a demonstrable sociological proposition, it seems to me that one of the most important long-range potentials of automation and increased leisure will be a renaissance in family life. My reasons are that the family will be uniquely endowed to discover and foster the interests and talents of its individual members: the family will provide a context of intimate human relationships within which individual achievement and satisfaction can be translated into happy and purposeful lives; and the family will afford a primary link through which this social product--greater than the sum of its individual members--may contribute to the welfare of the community and enhancement of the wider society. These are fundamental functional roles that can be supplemented and enriched but not supplanted by other social institutions.

### VII. Conclusion

It can be inferred from this essay that the fate of the family is intricately intertwined with that of the local community--a social institution that has suffered equally from the depredations of urban industrial society. Just as the family must provide a primary social context conducive to the integrated development of its members, so the community must provide a hospitable environment through which individual families may relate themselves to the wider society. The status and future of the community in modern society, however, is a subject that requires a full and separate treatment on its own account.

In concluding this discussion of the evolution of the family, we must leave the province of sociology and make a brief excursion into moral philosophy and politics. In the last analysis a society will get the sort of social institutions--including the sort of family--it deserves. Like other technologies, automation is morally neutral. The goals to which it is directed and the manner in which its momentum is channelled will depend on the values that society holds dear and the success with which such values are translated into political and social action.



Our contemporary material and pecuniary values and the social and psychological sacrifices that have been made to attain them may have had some relevance to an age of mechanization and economic scarcity. But it would be folly, indeed, to approach an era of automation suffering from the distorted conception that human beings are to be manipulated and adjusted to the requirements of the technology and economic system rather than committed to a policy that the achievements of science and technology must be controlled and directed to an enhancement of the quality of human living.

With the advent of automation, authoritarianism, invidious competition, and apathy must give place to co-operation and democratic participation translated into a viable philosophy of everyday life. And finally, respect for talent rather than wealth, understanding, love, and mutual support must be honoured and cultivated within the family and between families if the home is to flourish as a hospitable nexus between the individual and his social environment.

Faced with the imagination and effort required to transform urban industrial society into an environment conducive to human satisfaction and development, there is a strong temptation to settle for the pseudo-social solidarity that can be induced by concentrating public attention on the enemy outside the gates. But this is a dangerous game to play in a thermo-nuclear age, partly because of the inevitable internal corruption spawned within the garrison state and partly because war itself finally becomes the only catharsis that can dispel the cumulative tension bred by the fear of war.

Both automation and nuclear armaments have become pressing dimensions of the contemporary human situation. Neither may be nostalgically wished away. A commitment to harness automation to build a brave new world could provide the sense of individual identity and social destiny that we seem to have lost. A commitment to strengthen the United Nations into an adequate legal and institutional infrastructure for the emerging world community could permit the new society to develop in freedom from the threat of nuclear destruction.



For each of us to do less than accept our share of responsibility for meeting this dual challenge of the twentieth century would be to fail to hand on to our children a heritage of courage and hope.

